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The Guinean belt: the peoples between Mount Cameroon and the Ivory Coast

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Viewed from the narrow historiographical standpoint, the seventh to eleventh centuries of the Christian era constitute a silent period in the history of the coast and inland regions of Lower Guinea. For one thing the documentary sources, European or Arab, have little or nothing to offer. They begin to touch on this area only from the thirteenth/fourteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively. Oral tradition on the other hand, more reliable for more recent centuries, become suspect with greater time depth.

Used in conjunction with information from art, archaeological and related anthropological (especially linguistic) sources, it can shed new light on this early period of Lower Guinea history. The art of some Lower Guinea peoples has valuably depicted how people looked and dressed, what their weapons and buildings looked like at different periods, as well as providing us with an independent time scale for the history of such peoples.

In what follows, the above-mentioned sources are examined closely for what they have to tell about the types of terrains that existed in the Lower Guinea region between the seventh and eleventh centuries; who their inhabitants were at the time as distinct linguistic and societal groups; and the manner of their life styles. The forms of relationships that existed between them and outside groups, as well as who these outsiders were, are also investigated.

The ecological setting

The Lower Guinea Coast refers normally to the stretch from Cape Palmas – the border between northern Liberia and Ivory Coast – to Cameroon, and is divided into two natural zones. The western half extending from Cape Palmas to the Benin River is smooth and almost featureless, whereas a zone of submergence stretches from the Benin River to Mount Cameroon (640 km). The featureless stretch is characterized by wide and almost flat coastal plains as well as river outlets often deflected by long-shore drift which moves from south-east to north-west. Between Cape Three Points

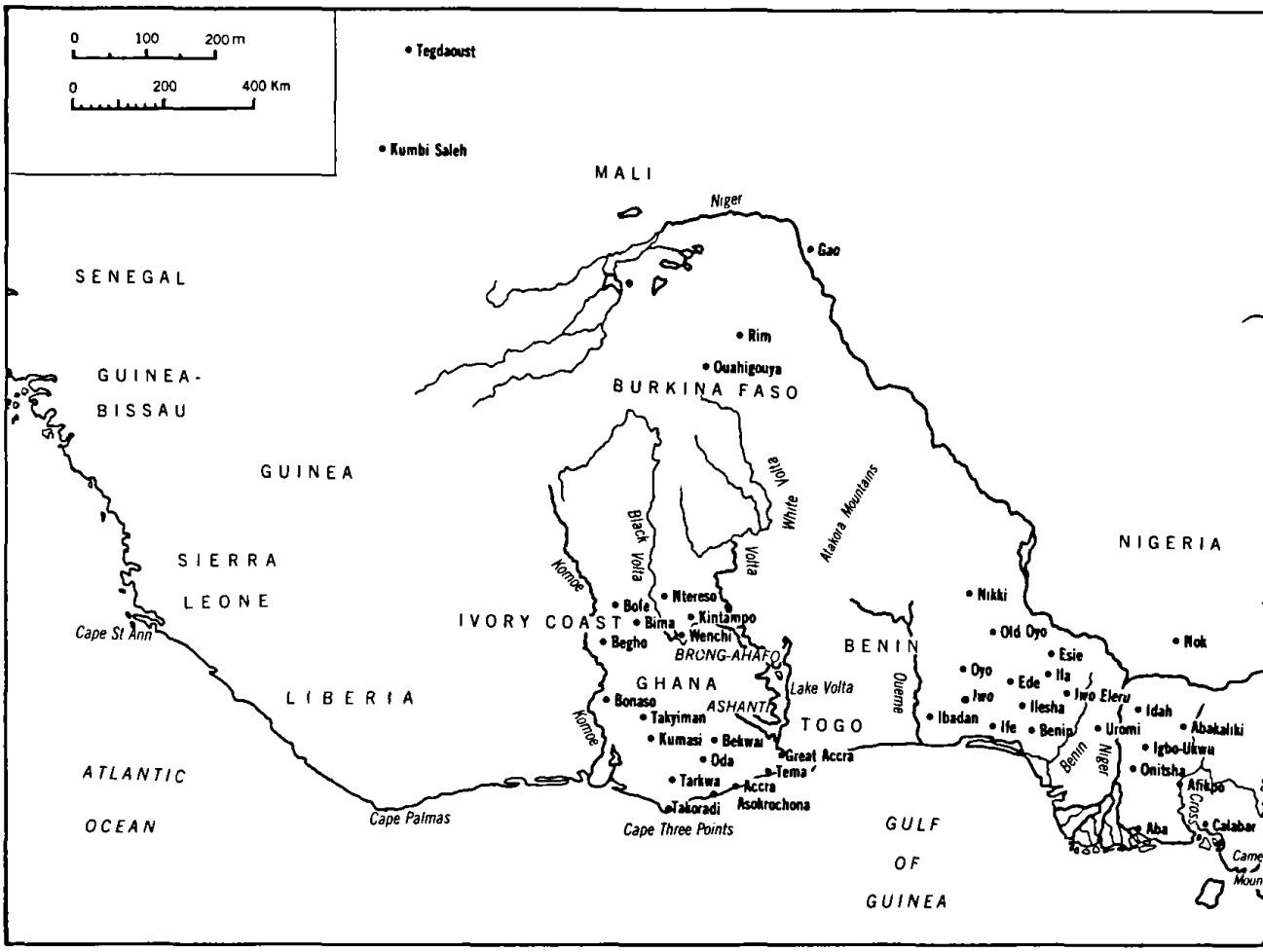

FIG. 17.1 *Towns and sites mentioned in the text*

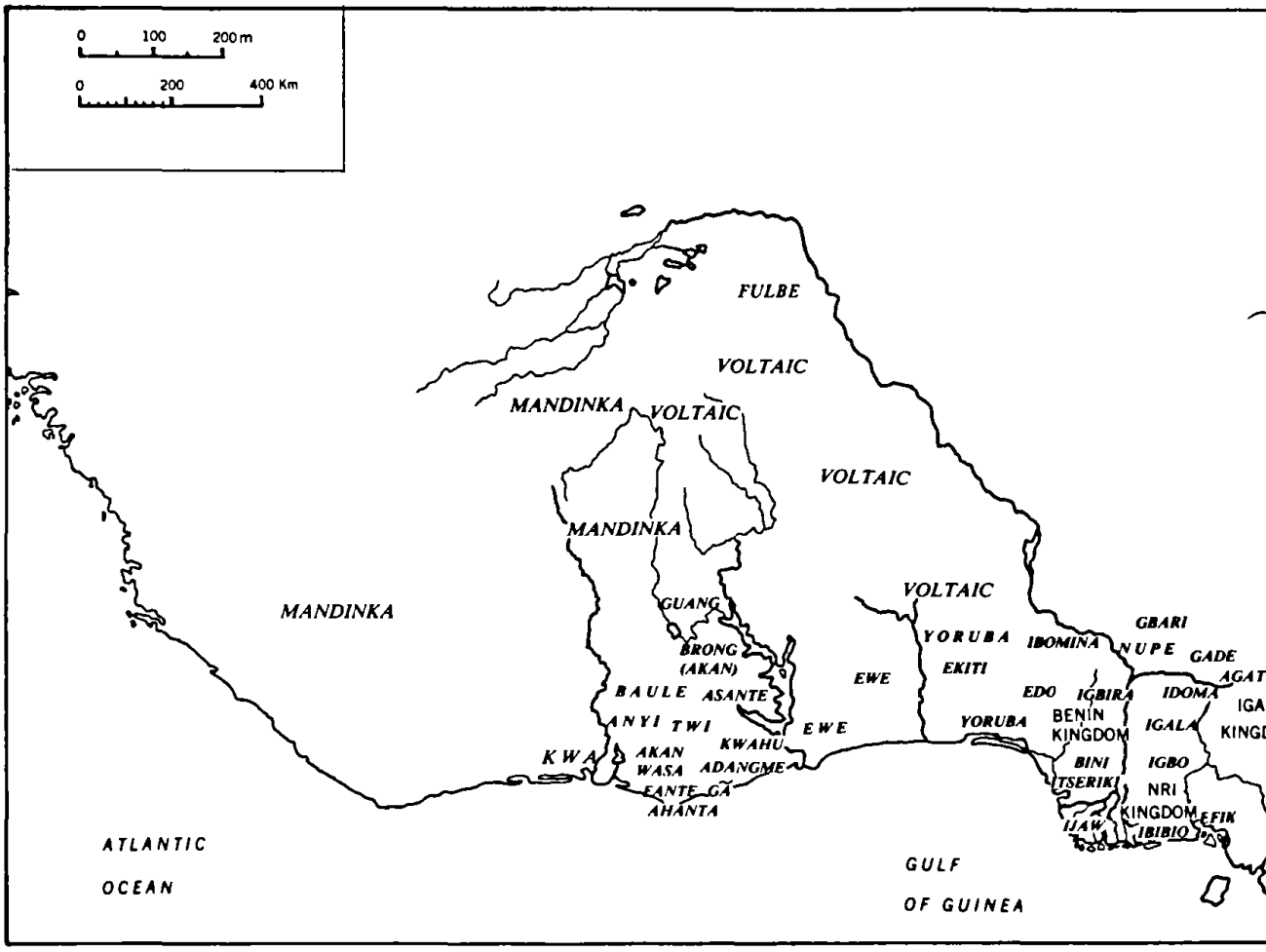

FIG. 17.2 *Language groups, peoples and kingdoms mentioned in the text*

and the Volta River, low plateaux approach the coast; and dunes are present across estuaries and valley mouths. The zone of submergence, by contrast, comprises the submerging Niger delta which has several openings into the sea; wide, shallow, continually changing bars formed by an eastward coastal drift; and finally estuaries like the Cross River and Rio del Rey which are lined with continuous swamps.

In parts of the coastal zone to the west of the Niger delta, there are some cliffs, and lagoons separated from the ocean by sand ridges. In Ghana and Nigeria outer sand bars of varying width provide effective shelters for the lagoon waterways.

The shore of the mainland north of the lagoons is rocky and cliffed in many places, and modern settlements tend to use the higher sites while the older villages are more frequently at lagoon level.

Behind the coastal strip, there are the southern Asante (Ashanti) plains and upland in Ghana, and the low plateaux in Togo and the Republic of Benin. The Asante uplands have for long been one of the most densely populated parts of West Africa, principally because they are adequately watered, have fertile soils and are marginally situated relative to the northern savanna forest which is restricted to the west of the sandstone escarpment of the Volta basin and the southern end of the Togo mountains. Forest savanna reappears along the coast eastward from Takoradi, changing to true savanna on the Accra plains and extending to the north-east along the dry corridor of the mountains. Mangrove and swamp vegetation occur in the outer edge of the relatively small Volta delta. The open vegetation of the plains is due primarily to the lack of rainfall. Marked differences of soil exist as between the Accra plains and the Volta delta and within the plains themselves.

The Niger delta as a whole is an enormous mass of mixed sediments whereas the Volta has a disproportionately small delta in relation to river length. The Niger delta is large by any standard. East of the Niger there is a broad belt of sedimentary rocks, within which lie the Anambra basin in the north, and the Cross River basin in the south.

The Lower Guinea plains show much greater diversity of climate and vegetation than of landform. The eastern 'dry corridor' crosses the plains from north-east to south-west with mean annual totals of less than 1140 mm extending from the north to the sea and also occurring in the Niger Valley. Immediately to the east of the Atacora Mountains of Togo, annual rainfall averages over 1270 mm along the watershed to Nikki, but totals diminish rapidly northward. To the south-east of the corridor annual totals increase to over 1525 mm. These rainfall totals are reflected in the vegetation pattern. High forest is present in the districts east of Ibadan and south of the watershed, and the greater part of the plains is under open savanna woodland. This open vegetation probably contributed to the development of the relatively large states in this region (e.g. in Yorubaland and the modern Republic of Benin).

Linguistics and early history

Archaeological evidence, especially from surface finds and from shrines (e.g. Ife and Benin in Nigeria), as well as from excavations (e.g. Asokrochona, Kintampo and Ntereso in Ghana; Ugwuelle-Uturu, Iwo Eleru, Afikpo rock shelters in Nigeria) indicate that the Lower Guinea coast and forest now occupied by Kwa-speaking and Benue-Congo-speaking peoples have experienced a long occupation by farmers, and before this by hunters several thousand years ago. Although archaeological and linguistic (glottochronological) evidence suggests a general physical and cultural relationship between the earlier and present inhabitants, such a relationship is yet to be precisely determined. Such delimitation is necessary especially as some of these present inhabitants have myths of origin that tend to show that they have come into their areas of present abode relatively recently.

Linguistic studies suggest that the greater part of the forest belt of West Africa, an area stretching over 1600 km from central Liberia to beyond the Lower Niger in Nigeria is occupied by peoples speaking a series of related languages, with underlying similarities in vocabulary and structure. These are the Kwa and Benue-Congo sub-families of the Niger-Congo language family.

In the central region, the most important (i.e. populous) of these language groupings are Akan (Twi, Fanti, etc.), and Guang dominant in Ghana and Ivory Coast; Gã and Adangbe (Dangme) in southern Ghana; Ewe dominant in Togo and the Republic of Benin and also spoken in south-eastern Ghana. Following Greenberg,[1] the members of the eastern Kwa sub-family in Lower Guinea are Yoruba-Igala; the Nupe group (including Nupe, Gbari, Igbirra and Gade); Edo; the Idoma group (including Idoma, Agatu and Iyala); Igbo; and Ijo. Benue-Congo-speakers are present directly north of and along parts of the Cross River and include the Ibibio, Efik and Ekoi groupings as well as the Tiv.

If underlying similarities in vocabulary and structure characterizing each of these language groups reflect a common proto-language for each, then it means that linguistic evidence points to early cultural continua over the areas they are found in: – Kwa over much of the Guinea forest, Benue-Cross over eastern parts of the Guinea forest and the adjoining savanna – and subsequent diversification from early but unknown dates.

Comparative linguistics suggest that Akan, together with Anyi, Baule, Chakosi, Nzema and Ahanta belongs to a Tano sub-group to which the Guang languages, Abure and Belibe do not belong. Such studies also indicate that the Volta-Comoe languages (Akan group) constitute a true ancestral group to many other Kwa subgroupings; that the Togo remnant languages are distinct from the Ewe and Gã-Adangme groups respectively and that the Akan, Ewe, Guang and Gã-Adangme groups constitute a group less closely related to the Kwa language groups of southern Nigeria.

1. J. H. Greenberg, 1955, 1963a.

The Niger–Benue confluence is generally regarded as a likely centre of origin or dispersal for the eastern Kwa-speaking peoples, while the Benue-Congo speakers are believed to be more recent arrivals in this area from the east. That the divisions between the major Kwa groups must be very old has been inferred from exploratory studies in glottochronology.[2] Although specific time inferences may be considered to be purely speculative, the presence of similarities in important cultural features of the present speakers of these languages, and evidence of having occasionally been influenced similarly does suggest a considerable period of stable divergence of communities in the area.[3] So also is the fact that generally the Kwa languages are very distinctive and divergent from the more widespread linguistic groups that surround them. Indeed they could be survivors of once more widely spread linguistic stocks.

It seems also that there is no clear boundary between some of Greenberg's Kwa (e.g. Igbo) languages and Benue-Cross languages such as Ibibio, Efik and Kele. As noted by Williamson, there are some Benue-Congo languages (like Jukun) without noun-class systems, while some Kwa languages (e.g. Dogama and Edo) have noun-class systems.[4] On the other hand it seems that the Igbo and Efik languages, having been in intimate contact for a long period, could have experienced a certain amount of undetected borrowing, even in basic vocabulary.

Historical geographic evidence furthermore suggests that the already inhabited forest was an obstacle to penetration by later peoples. When such penetration occurred, it was not in the form of mass migrations, but was rather confined to small groups who, even if they exerted great cultural influence, were probably absorbed linguistically and sometimes physically by the local populations.

Apart from principal ethnic groups such as the Akan-Baule of Ghana and the Ivory Coast, the Bini (Edo-speakers), Yoruba, Igbo and Ijo of Nigeria, the Lower Guinea region has also been inhabited by other groups neighbouring the mentioned ones. Many times, the histories of the larger and smaller ethnic groups were inextricably intertwined. Some groups actually intruded into the midst of the others, and there was much cross-cultural influence.

The Gold Coast between 600 and 1100

The period from the seventh to the eleventh century in the Gold Coast (present-day southern and central Ghana) was clearly a formative one, transitional between the prehistoric village complexes antedating the seventh century on the one hand, and the urban, commercial, high-level

2. Cf. R. G. Armstrong, 1962, 1964b.
3. R. G. Armstrong, 1964b, p. 136.
4. K. Williamson, 1971, p. 252.

technology complexes of 1200 and after, on the other. The apparent obscurity of the period 600–1100 is due not to the uneventfulness of the period *per se* (since the earlier prehistoric era −1500–+500 has been heavily documented from several parts of the country), but rather to the relatively small amount of attention given to the period by scholars and the incidence of research.

The prehistoric background

During the first and second millennia before the Christian era various parts of the Gold Coast forest and savanna were settled by village folk who built houses of mud, wood, stone or laterite blocks and practised a subsistence economy combining fishing, hunting, gathering or 'cultivation' of yam, oil palm, fruits, cow pea, hackberry, and *Canarium* fruit and the herding of shorthorn cattle and goats.[5] While the evidence for pastoralism is strong and clear, that for arable or crop farming is rather tenuous, mainly because archaeo-botanical evidence has been hard to find in the tropical soils. Nevertheless, there is such an abundance of technological evidence in the form of polished stone axes and stone hoes for wood-felling, bush-clearing and soil preparation that one cannot but assume that some tubers such as indigenous yam and some grains, such as Guinea corn or millet were cultivated from an early date.

Of the known village sites referred to as the 'Kintampo complex' after the type-site located in the Brong region, 80 per cent have been excavated. The villages so far excavated vary in territorial size from 2000 sq.m (Mumute-Brong), to 115 300 sq.m (Boyase, near Kumasi), and to 21 000 sq.m (Kintampo KI site). Some of the village sites may indeed be comparable to modern villages of Ghana in terms of size and population. The technology and subsistence economies of the prehistoric villages indicate strong adaptations to the environment and specialization among the village folk. There are hints that special areas were reserved for use as potters' workshops, stone-tool knappers' workshops, or grain-milling quarters etc. The Kintampo complex also provides the earliest evidence of ceramic sculpture in the Gold Coast. The populations whose material cultural remains are represented in the Kintampo complex need not have spoken one language in all the regions, as Colin Painter avers, in associating Guan with the Kintampo complex.[6] Indeed, it is possible that any or all of the proto-Akan, proto-Guan and proto-Gã/Dangme languages were in use by the first millennium before the Christian era. From the correlation of linguistic studies on Baule, Agni, Bia and Akan with archaeology, there is emerging the possibility (still yet to be tested) that proto-Akan evolved in the forest and savanna environment straddling the middle and southern

5. C. Flight, 1967, 1976.
6. C. Painter, 1966.

parts of the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast and that the Kintampo complex, whose sites have now been identified in both countries, may well be the archaeological equivalent of an ecologically adapted proto-Akan speaking populace which knew no territorial boundary such as now exists between the Ivory Coast and Ghana.[7]

The archaeology of the Accra Plains suggests that Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers and fisherfolk who had a shellfish economy and potting technology were already active in the area of Gao lagoon (Tema) between the fourth and second millennia before the Christian era[8] and that they subsequently took to the establishment of village farming settlements such as are attested at the Kintampo complex site of Christian's Village located near the University of Ghana at Legon. At the site of Ladoku, a Late Stone Age flake industry associated with decorated pottery has been found stratified directly below an Iron Age level with Dangme-type Cherekecherete pottery and a bauxite-bead industry dated by carbon-14 to 1325–1475.[9]

While small-scale movement of peoples and trade and cultural contacts are regular features in the evolution of most societies and must be recognized as such, the old idea of mass exodus of people from place to place is, except for rare cases, an unconvincing approach to explaining ethnic and cultural origins. In this respect, the old views of migration origins of the Akan from Egypt or ancient Ghana, and the view of Gã-Dangme origin from what is now the Republic of Benin/Nigeria must, on archaeological and linguistic grounds, be regarded as far fetched.[10]

One of the major landmarks in the cultural evolution of the Gold Coast peoples is the inception and development of iron technology. Its adoption was crucial in the rise of society from a stage of peasant village economy and isolationism to one characterized by high-level technological competence, large-scale agriculture, diverse industries and crafts, complex trade systems and socio-political systems. The earliest evidence for iron technology is from Begho (+105–255) and Abam, Bono Manso (+290 –350). Excavations at these sites have produced ruins of furnaces, slag and pottery as well as charcoal usable for dating purposes.

Evidence for the period 600–1100

The period between 600 and 1300 has been described as the 'dark age' in the history of the Gold Coast, in the sense that relatively much less is known of the period than for other periods during the last four millennia. The available evidence, however, leads one to hypothesize that this was essentially a formative period during which a start was made in the laying

7. F. Dolphyne, 1974.
8. J. C. Dombrowski, 1980.
9. J. Anquandah, 1982.
10. Cf. M. E. Kropp-Dakubu, 1976; A. A. Boahen, 1977.

of the infrastructure of society. Because of the relative paucity of evidence for reconstructing the history of this period, one must make allowance for a certain amount of extrapolation of evidence from earlier or later periods and also for the use of circumstantial evidence.

Akanland

The rockshelter site of Amuowi near Bono Manso has a date (+370–510) which is slightly antecedent to the period under discussion. But this date ties in with the date for iron-smelting at Abam, Bono Manso. The Brong of Bono Manso and Takyiman have ethnohistorical traditions which suggest a local origin from the Amuowi sacred hole or rock shelter. Every year, at their *Apoo* festival, the Takyiman Brong recall their traditions of origin in song:

> We came from Amuowi,
> Creator of old;
> We are children of Red Mother Earth
> We came from Amuowi.

The evidence of pottery and dating from the Amuowi excavations suggest that from around the sixth century the Brong of the Bono Manso area were establishing permanent settlements that would lead later to the proto-urban and urban settlement at Bono Manso.[11]

The site of Bonoso has an early date that falls exactly within this period. Excavations conducted there[12] brought to light an iron-smelting industry with slag, iron implements and pottery ornamented with comb impressions. The site is dated by carbon-14 to 660–1085. Oral traditions of the Wenchi Brong assert that their ancestral clans emerged from a hole in the ground at Bonoso near Wenchi after being unearthed by a pig-like quadruped called *wankyie*. The traditions point to Bonoso as the place where the ancestors established their nuclear settlements before moving to their first capital site at Ahwene Koko (Old Wenchi).

A third Brong site belonging to this period is the proto-urban settlement at Begho which oral traditions name after the legendary founder Efua Nyarko. The Nyarko suburb which is dated by carbon-14 to 965–1125,[13] extends over an area of about one square kilometre. The excavations there revealed evidence of iron implements, copper objects, ivory and pottery with slip and painted decorations, akin to ninth-century pottery from New Buipe (Figs. 17.3–17.5). Altogether the data from Nyarko reflects the general tendencies of the period 600-1100, namely, craft and technological specialization with proto-urbanism and possibly the beginnings of the

11. K. Effah-Gyamfi, 1978.
12. J. Boachie-Ansah, 1978.
13. L. B. Crossland, 1976.

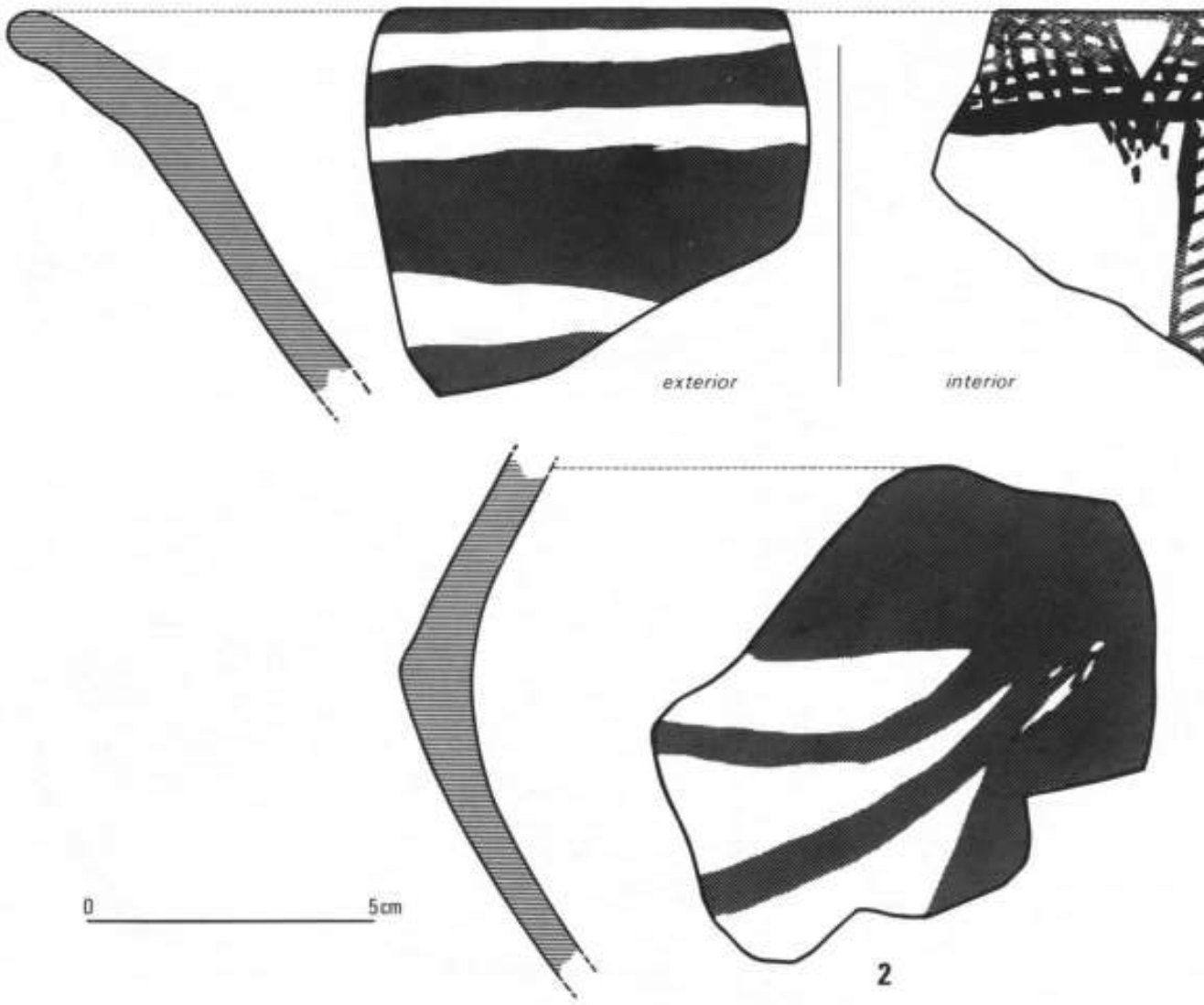

FIG. 17.3 *Tenth- to eleventh-century painted pottery from the Nyarko quarter of the Begho trading metropolis, Republic of*

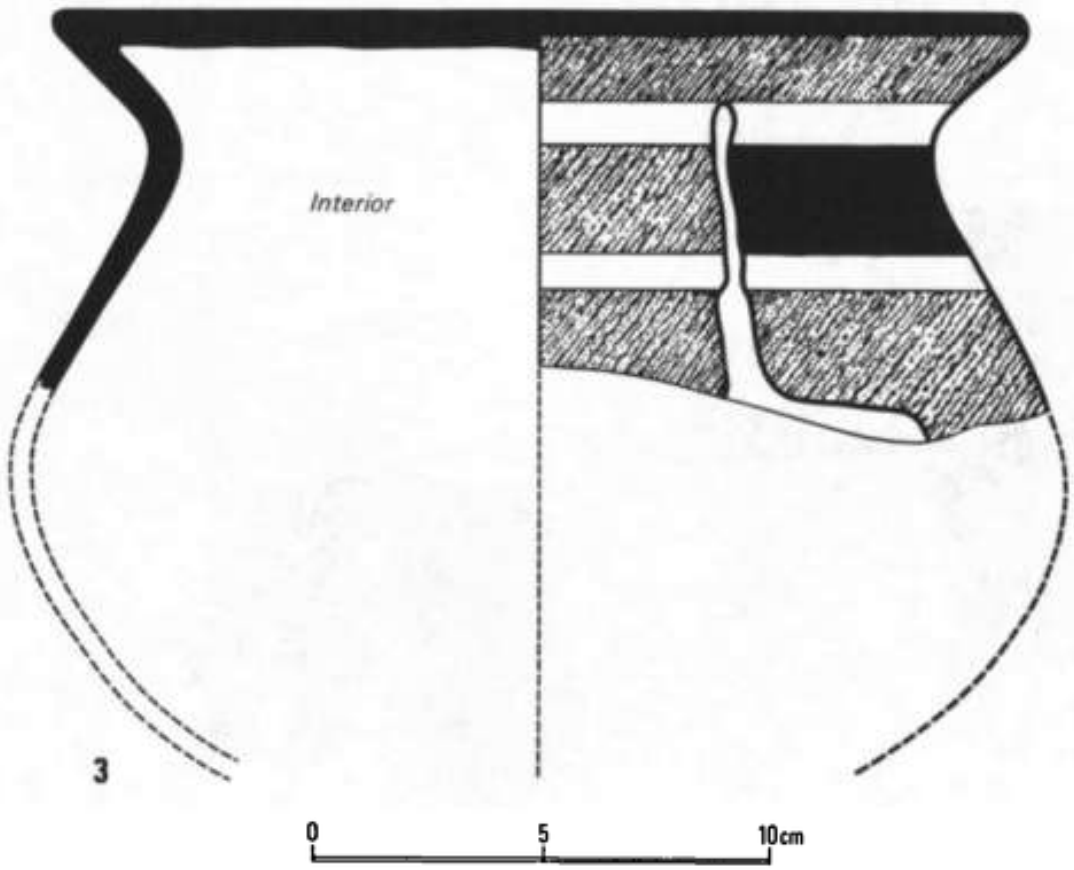

FIG. 17.4 *Seventh- to ninth-century pottery with slip and roulette-impressed decoration from New Buipe, Republic of Ghana*

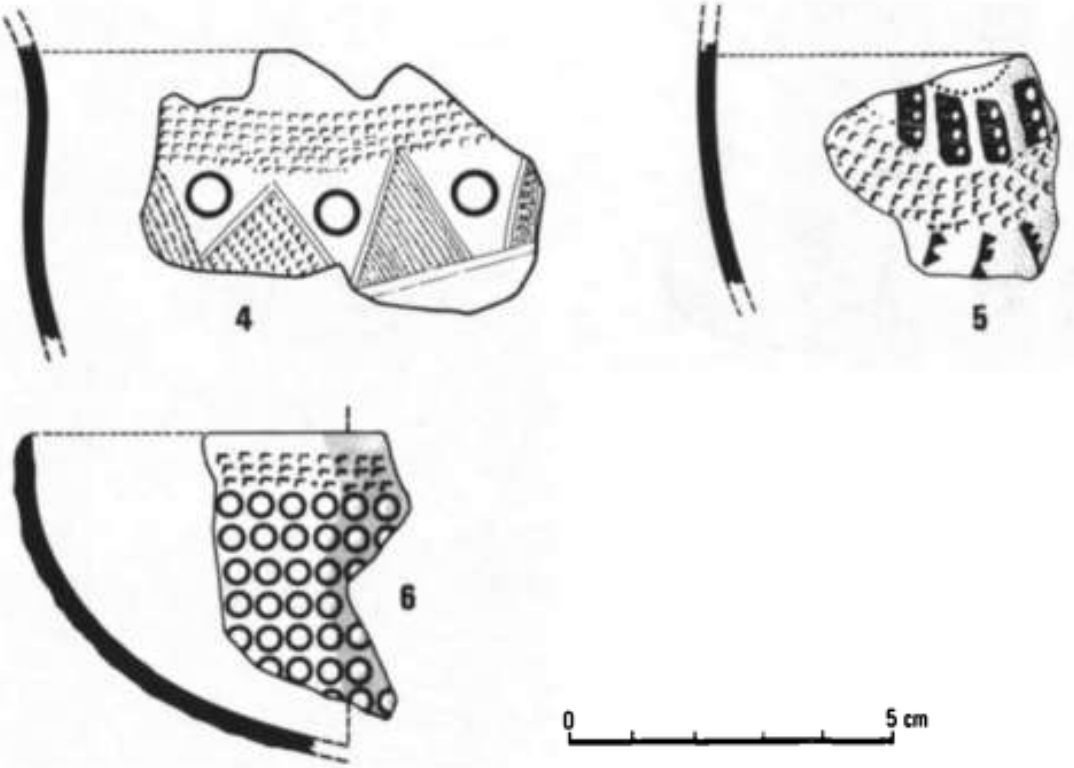

FIG. 17.5 *Seventh- to ninth-century pottery with stamp-impressed decoration from New Buipe, Republic of Ghana (after R. N. York, 1973)*

ivory industry and export trade which was to become important in subsequent centuries. Indeed the ethno-archaeological record points to the Brong region as a pioneering Akan area for the evolution of Iron Age farming, metallurgy, urbanism, state formation and long-distance commerce[14] and the period 600–1100 in Brong, however dimly presented to us by the paucity of evidence, was clearly one of active preparation for the era that was to be the high-water mark of Brong civilization.

The Asante and Wassa areas are well known for their prominent hill-top sites which were the favourite locations of Iron Age settlements of the period between the beginning of the Christian era and 1500. The most notable of these sites are Nkukoa Buoho (near Kumasi), Bekwai, Kwapong, Obuasi Monkey Hill, Nsuta, Tarkwa, Ntirikurom and Odumparara Bepo. The sites appear to have been village settlements with palisades. They are characterized by concentrations of pottery with overhanging lips and profuse ornamentation on bodies and rims. The pottery is sometimes found in association with iron slag, furnace fragments and anachronistic Stone Age carry-overs such as polished stone axes, quartz beads, microliths, grinding stones and occasionally, as at Odumparara, bauxite beads. Although none of the sites has as yet been properly excavated and dated by carbon-14, their characteristic archaic pottery type places them well before the period 1600–1900 when the fashion among potters of Akanland was the complex architectural pot-form with 'smoke-glazing' as ornamentation instead of the earlier picturesque body ornamentation. Oliver Davies[15] described the Asante and Wassa hill-top sites as 'medieval' in date, a term which is manifestly unsatisfactory in the African traditional cultural context. At Nkukoa Buoho near Kumasi, the hill-top complex pottery seems to follow chronologically the Kintampo complex period which suggests that the hill-top profusely decorated pottery of this area belongs to the period 600–1100 or thereabouts. If nothing else does, at least the evidence of iron technology of this complex does point to the foundation-laying character of this period preparatory to the major epoch of urbanization, state formation and long-distance trade evidenced in Adanse, Denkyira and Asante (Figs. 17.6 and 17.7).

The area of Akyem Manso and Akwatia is noted for its production of valuable exportable minerals. Its importance for archaeology, however, lies in its earthen fortifications.[16] These are characterized by high mud embankments constructed as a defensive structure surrounding each village settlement. On the inner side of the embankment was a deep trench or ditch. These earthworks are a common feature at Akwatia, Manso, Oda, Abodum, Kokobin, Domiabra, etc. A number of the fortified sites have been excavated in an attempt to test the two hypotheses advanced to explain their function. The first hypothesis is that they were constructed

14. J. Anquandah, 1982.
15. O. Davies, 1967.
16. ibid.

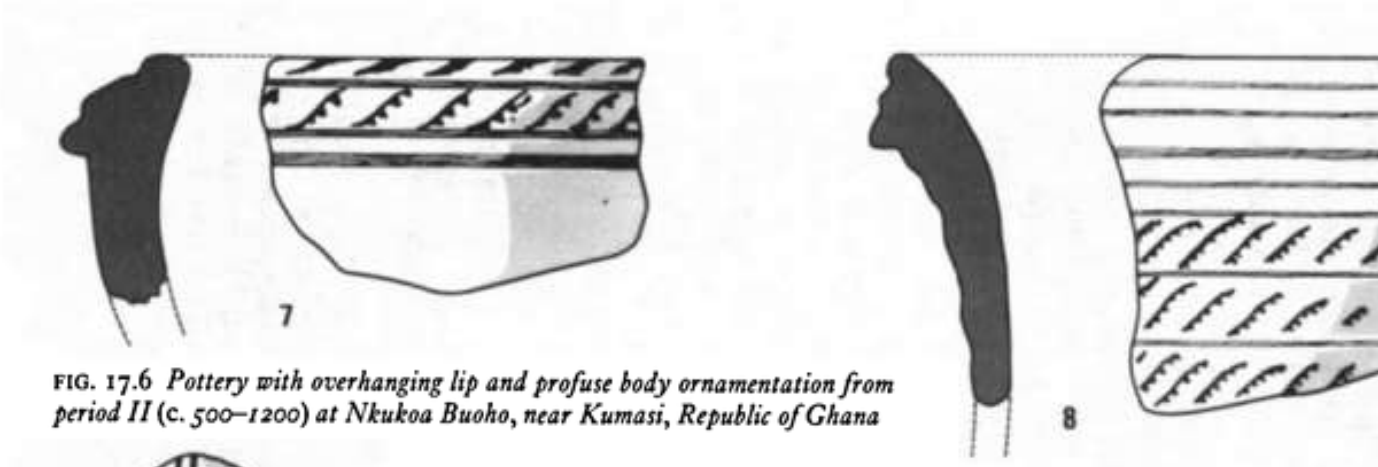

FIG. 17.6 *Pottery with overhanging lip and profuse body ornamentation from period II* (c. *500–1200*) *at Nkukoa Buoho, near Kumasi, Republic of Ghana*

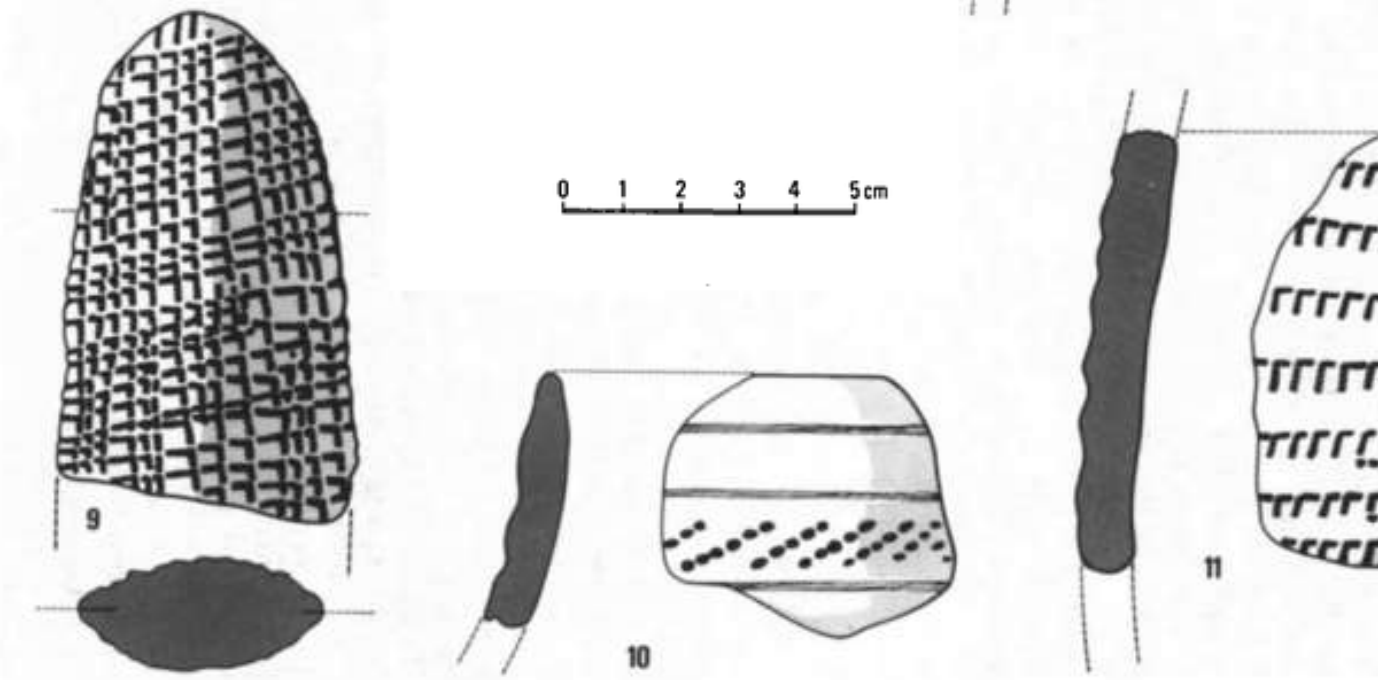

FIG. 17.7 *Kintampo 'neolithic' Complex Culture materials from period I* (c. *−1500 to −500*) *at Nkukoa Buoho, near K Ghana. Left: pot-shaping tool; centre and right: stamped pottery*

for defence. The second is that they were to wall in labour camps built for the exploitation of alluvial gold deposits of the Birim Valley.[17] It appears that the 'defence' school of thought has tended to carry more weight than the 'labour camp' school of thought. The most recent ethno-archaeological studies undertaken at the Akyem Manso earthworks revealed profusely ornamented pottery with overhanging rims (akin to that of the Asante/ Wassa hill-top complex), associated with evidence of iron smelting, polished stone axes, beads and grinding stones.[18]

The Guan

Oral traditions state that Kwahuland was among the areas occupied by Guan-speaking people prior to the arrival of Adanse people in the area and that these pre-Akan Guan were called Kodiabe on account of their predilection for a subsistence economy based on oil palm. The traditions name a number of pioneering leaders who led the Guan in establishing settlements in the area, namely, Adamu Yanko, Bransem Diawuo, Odiaboa, Kosa Brempong and Yaw Awere. It is said that around 1200 the Guan settlers who were in occupation of the Afram Plains established their capital at Ganeboafo whence the Atara dynasty ruled the Afram Plains Guan. A commercial centre was set up at Juafo Abotan where brisk commerce was pursued with the Sudanic belt in ivory, kola, cattle, salt and slaves.[19] Archaeology is yet to investigate the substance of these traditions. However, a number of excavations have been undertaken at Bosumpra Cave (the name is thought to be connected with the Guan deity, Bosumpra), and rock shelters at Apreku, Tetewabuo and Akyekyemabuo.[20] The excavations supported by carbon-14 dating indicate that *c.* 1000–1300 the Kwahu scarp was occupied by versatile hunters, fisherfolk, pastoralists and oil palm exploiters who produced 'smoke-glazed' pottery.[21]

Another area where archaeology has been focusing attention on the Guan is Kyerepong Dawu. The indigenous populace of Dawu Akuapem is Guan-speaking, though its language and culture have been considerably overshadowed in recent times by the Akwamu and Akuapem Akan peoples. The area of Dawu and Awukugua is marked by numerous large mounds representing litter deposited by the local people over long periods, which carbon-14 dating fixes at *c.* 1400–1600. Excavations of the mounds have revealed debris including pottery imported from Shai, ivory ornaments, bone combs, copper and iron products, and *akuaba* flat-headed clay sculptures.[22] Although the dating of the middens is a little later than the period

17. P. Ozanne, 1971.
18. D. Kiyaga-Mutindwa, 1976.
19. J. R. Wallis, 1955.
20. F. B. Musonda, 1976.
21. A. B. Smith, 1975; C. T. Shaw, 1944.
22. T. Shaw, 1961.

we are concerned with here, the cultural context associated with the ubiquitous mounds of Akuapem suggests foundation-laying processes which heralded the modern states of the Akuapem Hill-Guan.

The Gã and Dangme

The archaeology and ethnolinguistics of the Accra Plains, examined dispassionately and free from the prejudices of adulterated oral traditions, indicate that the Gã and Dangme peoples have probably been occupying settlements in the Accra Plains for some one to two millennia.[23] Indeed one would go as far as hypothesizing autochthonous Gã and Dangme evolution in the Accra Plains. A number of sites such as Gbegbe, Little Accra, Prampram and Lõlõvõ, though as yet undated, contain ruins of settlements with concentrations of pottery not associated with European imports, thus suggestive of a period before 1400. True, there are settlement sites at Ayawaso, capital of Great Accra, Ladoku and Shai which date to the period 1550–1900, the major period of urbanization, state formation and complex trade systems (Fig. 17.8). On the other hand, Ladoku and Shai were the focus of numerous village settlements belonging to the period 600–1400, among them Cherekecherete, Adwuku, Tetedwa, Pianoyo and Hioweyo. The latest research in Accra Plains Dangmeland indicates that between 1000 and 1300 local Dangme settlers around Prampram, Dawhenya and Shai were evolving a life style of subsistence (pastoralism, fishing, salt-making and terraced agriculture based on Guinea corn cultivation), and a socio-theocratic system that was to lead to the rise of a conurbation or twin-township in 1300–1900 at Shai and Ladoku and a civilization characterised by elaborate herbal science, *Klama* proverbial and philosophical music and a combined theocratic and monarchical system.[24]

Eweland

Research work in Eweland has been confined largely to surface reconnaissance in places like Vume Dugame, Bator, Amedzofe-Avatime, Wusuta and Akpafu. Some of these sites provide quite common evidence of settlements with iron-working. The sites of Akpafu, Wusuta and Kanieme have

23. The question of the origin of the Gã and Dangme is controversial. The view of a migration origin from Dahomey/Nigeria area has been propagated by traditional Elders of Dangmeland including Carl Reindorf, Noa Akunor Aguae Azu, D. A. Puplampu, Nene Lomo II of Ada, Rev. S. S. Odonkor of Krobo and La Nimo Opta III of Doryumu, Shai. This view is supported by scholars like M. E. Kropp-Dakubu, E. O. Apronti, Irene Odotei and Louis Wilson.

24. J. Anquandah, 1982.

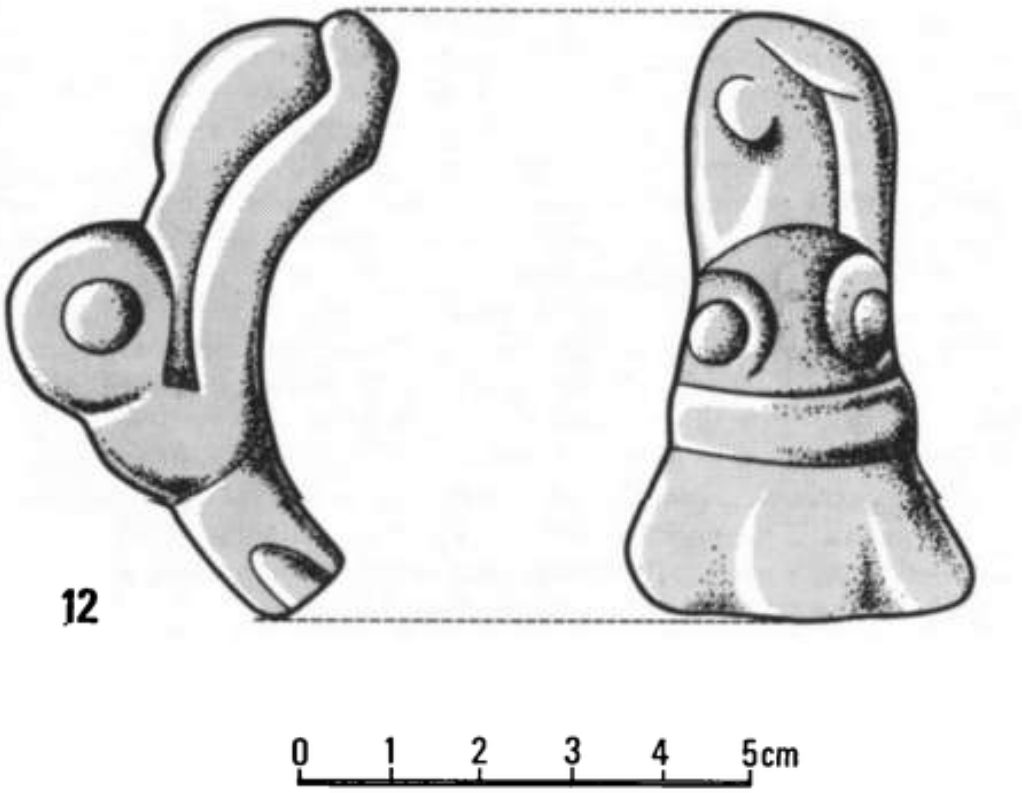

FIG. 17.8 *Shai Dangme potters from Cherekecherete Middle Iron Age site in the Accra Plains (Republic of Ghana) were legatees of seventh- to eleventh-century Iron Age peoples and made pottery decorated with stylized figurines of heads of domestic animals and humans*

traditions of iron-working spread over centuries and the archaeological evidence, though undated, does give support to the traditions. However, there are many sites in the Volta Region which, as indicated above, produce microliths, polished stone axes and stone hoes, suggesting a long continual occupation into modern times. There is really no reason not to associate the present-day Ewe occupants with the Iron Age and Late Stone Age cultural materials distributed widely throughout Ewe country.

Early urban settlement

The available evidence points to the existence of at least two principal types of urban settlements in what is now Ghana prior to European advent; commercial centres like Begho, and state capitals like Bono Manso. Settlements that were mostly trading centres grew up in the Tain–Volta confluence of present-day Ghana. Migrant elements and long-distance trade were important to their growth. Limited archaeological exploration indicated the existence of such settlements in Kitare, Begho, Bicu, Old Bima and Buipe among others.

The evolution of both local and immigrant groups at these sites, and their interrelationships, are yet to be explored in detail through systematic excavation. But present evidence from sites like Jakpawuase seems to suggest that prior to the advent of the Mande this region was reasonably well populated and contained large settlements, as well as clusters of a number of interrelated communities which had previously developed an interwoven network of local trade and exchange probably based on the bartering of food and agricultural produce.

Work at Begho revealed that the culture of this town was predominantly Brong, with evidence for significant outside influences. The quarters of the ancient town are described by Posnansky as consisting of areas of mounds often 'L'-shaped or in the form of hollow squares between one and two metres high and up to twenty metres across. The largest quarter, that of the Brong, consists of several hundred mounds in an area more than a kilometre across. The quarters are one to two kilometres apart, with an exposed outcrop of laterite between them, where the market was said to have been located.[25]

Other important market centres which probably grew up in the same general area at the time of Begho's existence and prospered largely due to the Middle Niger trade in the area include Bima and Bofe. The urban phase of Begho (Bew) was preceded directly by an agricultural-pastoral phase dating as far back as 3500 years ago. The societies involved lived in sizeable settlements and used Kintampo Neolithic-type tools. Evidence, especially pottery, suggests that before the mid-second millennium of the Christian era (especially the eleventh to twelfth centuries) settlements in the Begho vicinity (and pre-urban Begho phase) were mostly those of the indigenous Bono group.

According to Posnansky, Begho also developed as a larger nucleated centre before the advent of long-distance trade, its inhabitants exploiting fertile lands for agriculture, from as far back as the second century of the Christian era. Crops farmed included yams and oil palms with sorghums and millets being added later. In the course of time the town graduated from a Brong (Akan) foundation to incorporate Voltaic-speaking and Mande-speaking people engaged in different occupations.[26]

Begho existed as a trading centre from the eleventh century but did not attain its peak until the fourteenth century. Then it appears to have contained up to five hundred compounds and five thousand people. It comprised five territorially distinct quarters with the largest, that of the Brong, being well over half a kilometre across. Their farmlands stretched much further afield.

Although heterogeneous, the bulk of the population of Begho was probably of local origin (Brong and Pantera). Very little is known of the nature

25. M. Posnansky, 1973, pp. 156–62.
26. M. Posnansky, 1980.

of the society other than what can be inferred from a study of later traditional Akan life. The traditions nevertheless indicate the existence of domestic slaves and an active clan system. The grave goods and the variations in the inhumations indicate a variety of religious attitudes to burials.

Like many other ancient settlements, it is not clear how Bono Manso (16 km north of Takyiman) was founded. Oral information suggests that the site of Bono was founded by a group of people who were once inhabitants of a rock shelter referred to as Amuowi perhaps around the fifth century of the Christian era. According to Effah-Gyamfi the growth and importance of Bono owed much to the integration into one state of various pre-existing chiefdoms in the area around the end of the first millennium.[27] Bono Manso was not the earliest of the large villages and towns in this area; it was simply the first to acquire supremacy over all the settlements in the area through its primary role as the seat of the Bono kings.

Bono had rich deposits of *atwet weboo* (laterite nodules suitable for iron smelting) available to it. Archaeological survey has actually revealed at least five iron-working industrial sites all roughly equidistant from the streams and rivers. One of these sites dates to the fourth century of the Christian era, but some probably belong to the urban phase. Like Amuowi, however, the few pottery remains associated with the site which produced this early date are identical with those found at Bono Manso in the earliest deposits, suggesting the utilization of what became the site of Bono Manso by a society ancestral to the founders of the capital.

Bono Manso was also located at the savanna–forest contact zone where at the regional level savanna items could be exchanged for forest items. At the international level, this was the southernmost point to which pack animals could travel without any health hazards, and therefore the effective area for the exchange of foreign items for those from areas further south. Not only was the area where Bono Manso was located the source of alluvial gold which the Mande traders eagerly sought, it was also the source of kola nuts.

Unlike Begho there is no evidence for the existence of any alien quarter. This means that Bono's population was more ethnically homogeneous than Begho's. Bono's central organization also effectively controlled commercial activities, whereas in Begho commerce seems to have overriden political organization.

Effah-Gyamfi infers from pottery studies that Bono Manso may be an early Akan settlement. According to him the Bono Manso area may have been on the boundary between the early pure Akan cultural group to the south and the early non-Akan and the mixed Akan to the north and northwest respectively.[28] This and linguistic evidence suggest a continuity of many ethnic/cultural groups since the last five hundred years or so.

27. K. Effah-Gyamfi, 1975.
28. ibid.